

Idaho Panhandle Avalanche Center Preseason Advisory

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This is Kevin Davis with the Idaho Panhandle Avalanche Center. Today is November 22, 2011. We will begin issuing regular avalanche advisories December 16th. The avalanche advisory will be issued every Friday at 7:30 AM with an outlook for Saturday and Sunday, same as always. The Friends of the Idaho Panhandle Avalanche Center is working on a new website so we'll definitely let you know when that is up and running.

Here we go! Snowfall is accumulating rapidly in the mountains of North Idaho. Lookout Pass Snotel shows 4 inches in the last 24 hours and the ski area is reporting 7 inches, Lost Lake Snotel in the Clearwater drainage shows 5 inches in 24 hours. Silver Mountain is reporting 11 inches in 24 hours. To the north, Bear Mtn Snotel picked up 12 inches, Hidden Lake shows 16 inches, and Schweitzer Snotel is down but speaking with ski patrol, they said 23 inches in 24 hours. Groomers on the mountain said that drifts on the ridges could be 15 feet deep. Snow depths are ranging from 2-3 feet to the south and 3-4 feet to the north. Freezing levels are reaching up to the 5,000 foot level and could go higher before dropping again. That means heavy snow, rain, and increasing avalanche danger. Read on.

Recall that up until yesterday the weather has remained relatively cold. The couple of feet of snowpack on the ground consisted largely of low density snow and possibly surface hoar that has been preserved fairly intact by cold temperatures. Late last week winds and new snow also added to the variability by loading ridgetops with deep deposits that could be found on multiple aspects. End Chapter I – The cold snowpack settled. Chapter II – How to build a climax avalanche. With the accumulations of snow in the past 24 hours and rising temperatures, on a cold, faceted snowpack the likelihood of large and widespread avalanches is high. Add to that strong westerly winds and you have the makings for climax avalanches, to the ground, especially in steep windloaded terrain near ridgetops. I would strictly be an observer for the next few days while these strong weather systems pass through and work over the weak base of the pack. Avoid avalanche terrain and pay close attention to your proximity to avalanche paths; tracks and runout zones. Look for the signs of avalanche activity, shooting cracks, whumphing, rapid settlement, and obviously, avalanches. Stay off terrain where you see the signs. Be careful if you go out and have a great Thanksgiving!

In Sandpoint, these classes are currently scheduled.

December 15, “Beacon Practice Avy Gear Review.”

Jan. 10, “**Fire and Ice, Risk Assessment and Situational Awareness.**”

Feb. 10, “**Ten Years of Avalanche Fatalities in North Idaho.**”

These classes are *free to the public* and will be held from 6-8PM in the Conference Room of the New Forest Service Building in Sandpoint, 1602 Ontario St., west of town on the way to Dover. Call Kevin Davis at 265-6686 or John Olson at 946-3378 if you have a group that is interested in attending.

In the Silver Valley, these classes are currently scheduled.

January 21, “Avalanche Awareness, Route Finding, and Rescue

In the Silver Valley the class is conducted at the Silver Valley Forest Service Building in Smelterville at 10AM. The field session, beacon practice and rescue training will be held at Mullan Pass the same day. Contact Dan Frigard at 783-2131.

The State of Idaho Parks and Recreation Department in cooperation with the IPNF-AC, is conducting (***Free***) avalanche workshops for snowmobilers this winter in Coeur d’ Alene January 13th and 14th, Sandpoint January 27th and 28th. For more information go to the Idaho Parks and Recreation Department website at <http://parksandrecreation.idaho.gov/recreation/snowmobileeducation.aspx>, or call Marc Hildesheim, North Region Trails Specialist, at (208) 769-1511.

Check out these websites from our Neighbors for more information:

<http://www.glacieravalanche.org/currentadvisory.cfm>

<http://www.nwac.us/>

<http://www.avalanche.ca/>